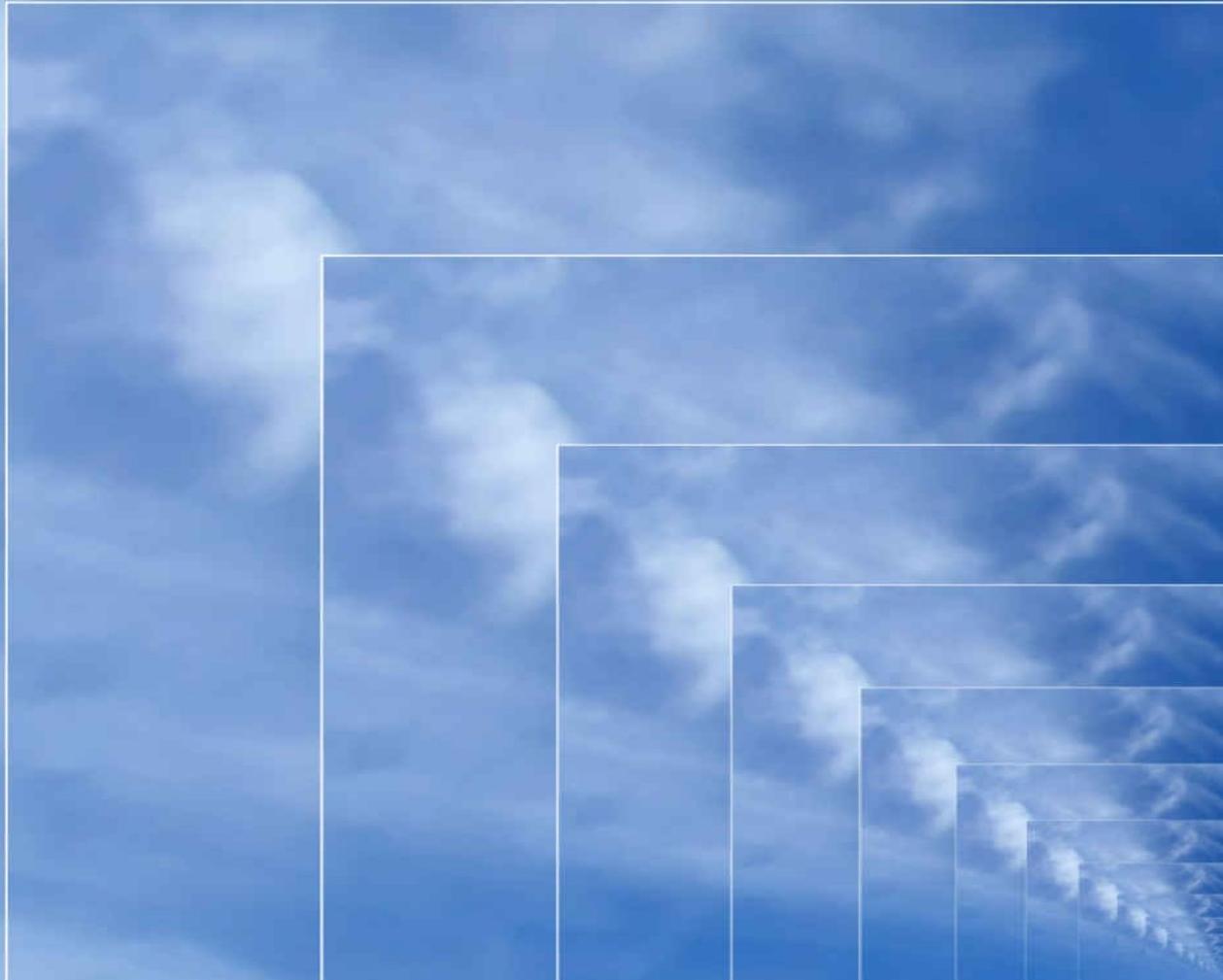


BRIGHT WORLD OF CHOICE

In search of the true and the real

by Troy R. Bishop



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One - The Mountain

1. Out of the Dark

Ours is a complex relationship, polished to simplicity through the years. The mountain is the teacher and I am the student. In the earlier phases of our relationship I seldom sought the summit except in troubled moments. But the alpine perspective, steeped in airy freedom and vast vision, has a way of guiding one's eyes beyond immediate things.

On the mountaintop I contact my greater self, see through greater eyes. It is as if the world is a great, parabolic bowl and the tip of the mountain its focal point. Relevancies converge here.

Today I have come to the mountain in the role of chronicler as well as student. The mountain has taught me much over the years. Now I wish to collect and record its pronouncements on the topic of *choice*.

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Once my interest was not so finely tuned to this subject. But then in a contemplative moment I sought remoteness and a high view. It was many years ago. A tropical island. High on a mountain, a house set in emerald palms. White clouds. An azure sky. Two thousand feet below, across a sunswept plain, the sparkling blue Caribbean Sea.

I had come to gaze from the mountain eyrie upon plain, sea, and sky and invoke an equally panoramic view of the inner world. Led to the Jamaican mountain by a thin but enduring thread, a guideline woven from

fibers of faith in a benevolent and accessible universe, I aimed to discern the place where rationality, intuition, and divine benevolence conjoin to illuminate the meaning of life.

Though the island was a spectacle of immense day and bright sunlight, it was also a land of deep night and blazing stars. In retrospect I perceive that some faculty, long overwhelmed by the clamor and shearing tensions of society, was released by my retreat on the island, allowing me to sense that I was in darkness.

My search, therefore, instinctively became a quest of the evening.

Nightly from the mountaintop I scrutinized the ebony, diamond-pierced heavens. No obscuring glare arrived from below. Elevated from the maze of everyday life and the rectangular grillwork of culture, the mountain was a rare observatory.

Like lights in a thousand-eyed planetarium, the circling constellations summoned to the screen of my questing mind the prominences of an inner sky. And I, like an ancient Sumerian caravan master who must traverse the dark sands of the Arabian Desert, or a Phoenician ship's captain who prepares to cross the night-muffled Mediterranean Sea, studied these personal guidestars.

So it was that I gradually perceived that I was plagued with one great, ubiquitous problem. What the problem was, I did not know, only one symptom: a puzzling failure of some of my goals, even assessedly greater ones, to deliver feelings of meaningful achievement when attained.

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Creatures of nature can be observed at their best where two contrasting environments meet. Waterfowl bask and feed where the marshwater pools.

Deer graze on tender spears at the tree line. Humans, likewise, are fashioned for the thin line between two worlds. Endowed with feet and hands that can contact things that are physical, they also possess hearts and minds to perceive goals that are not. Thus they inhabit a wondrous, fertile strip. Away from it wait only the awful, sucking bog of unchecked materialism or the dread, empty vacuum of unanchored spirituality.

The mountain is the place where heaven and earth meet. At night, the visible distinction between the two diminishes. From the Jamaican mountain, this effect was heightened by human technology below manifesting the image of natural processes above. The twinkling lights of nighttime Kingston, piercing the blackness, mirrored the starry expanse above, creating the appearance that I hung suspended between two heavens.

But only one was what it seemed. Finally, with surprising clarity, I comprehended the lesson of the mountain. The fertile strip of bright achievement and lasting fulfillment is not attained by accident or fortuity, nor by the indiscriminate pursuit of goals commended by others or by tradition.

Choice is ultimately mine. I can achieve intelligent, enlightened choice only if I examine and order the constellation of *values* inhabiting my inner sky and the reflected *goals* clustering the face of my inner earth. I endanger choice if I confuse the two or relinquish the role of one to the other.

My quest of the night became an undertaking of the day as I realized that it had happened. The inner landscape had opened.

Of course, said the mountain patiently. *How could it do otherwise?*

2. The Unity of the Days

Now it is the quiet countryside of Catoctin State Park, nestled in the

rolling greenness of Maryland, that meets my gaze. My mountain teacher here is weather-smoothed, trimmed with birch and pine, and crowned with a rocky overlook. Profound stillness cloaks the summit, where I stand.

To the east, the earth shimmers and melts in a silvery horizon. Farther, beyond the planetary curve, stands yesterday, bright and untouched as it was when the window of the east first opened to reveal it. A full turn around the planet stands another yesterday. And another. Like shiny mirrors they overlay one another, thin, crystal plates in the treasury of time.

The line of days is a corridor of successive, reflective panels. My portion of each connects to its predecessors and successors, constructing a laminated sculpture, the sum of my life abloom in a realm of time miraculously transformed into space. “Or on the hillside,” wrote J. R. Lowell, who seemed to have a feeling for such things, “always unforewarned, a grace of being, finer than himself, that beckons and is gone—a larger life.”

The planes of the days crowd closer together as they recede, fusing into a clear block, visual portal to an ineffable terrain. Realities there are multidimensional patterns. The essence of space, time, meaning, and value. Melted and cast into transcendent forms.

With absolute grace, each complements all the others. Their totality is vibrant. Alive. Beautiful beyond words. Ultimate of meaning and worth.

3. Wings of Choice

The unyielding rock presses against the waffled soles of my hiking boots, and pine scent brings accustomed pleasure. Scrabbly lichen on the sun-baked rock rings familiar chords.

A few miles away, though I cannot see it from here, a narrow road

winds to where gentle hills open like cupping hands upon Camp David. Presidents have visited there to gaze out upon the peaceful countryside as they pondered questions of power and compromise. Right and wrong. Loyalty and expediency.

I, also, face issues of choice. Considerations scaled down from the impersonal scope of a nation to the personal significance of a single life.

Invariably, choice involves extroverted behavior. A reach across boundaries.

The timeless unity beyond the horizon of the days shines out through human choice. It is a slim, golden chain of personal values threading through the unified life of a person. A bright, elastic bubble of shared values encompassing a group of persons. A luminous, attractive influence building associations from groups embracing mutually harmonious values.

A great influx of people from a multitude of cultures pours into this country. Widely removed places and deeply contrasting circumstances produce us. We reflect light in a variety of hues. We contrast as warm wood and bright steel.

Within one another's proximities we conduct our affairs, picnicking in the same parks, paying taxes on the same roads, frolicking on the same beaches.

Restaurants poll our tastes for their menus. Theaters vie for our attendance with their marquees. From our disparate visions emerge place names, architectural designs, and opinions.

Inevitably in this bouncing stream of life there will occur times when I am jerked up short by a response from someone that clangs to my sensibilities as puzzlingly inappropriate. At times I may feel myself

floundering in a sea of accumulated differences. If not attended to by clear vision and lucid reason, these incongruities can lodge in the deep places of my mind to annoy, frustrate, or even threaten me. For they do not wear the smooth, comforting familiarity of my tradition or experience.

Near the peak where I stand, golden eagles once flew. Solitary sovereigns of the trackless skies, even they know reliances. Air to soar. Prey to hunt. Universal rhythms to impel them up to take the day.

Many of my reliances are grounded in groups, which influence my perceptions. But like the golden eagle measuring the heavens with outstretched wingtips, I possess attributes and significances that transcend these things. My culture is an ocean of air. And I am equipped with wings of choice.

We of the variegated stream of humanity brush shoulders in shopping malls, our eyes dreaming of diverse things. Like floating soap bubbles, spheres of group tendency enclose each of us. Separate us. Truncate our dreams. We perceive each other confusedly, for the globular membranes which encircle us reflect back our own images.

It would seem hopeless of reconciliation. But the high perspective of the mountain is a way shower. From this peak I see a rich vista of treeland, meadow, lake, and hill. Each imparts irreplaceable tone to the countryside. The absence of any one of these would diminish the singing beauty.

I am only one small element in the landscape of life. If I were a grassland, would I desire that the whole world be grassland? Or all places in my vicinity? And even in the latter case, would not all the grasslands adjacent to me similarly desire grassland neighbors, resulting in a global, featureless plain?

I am glad that I cannot dictate what the world should be. Whatever my

specification, however grand my intent, I would design a narrow place. And it would be extremely grassy.

The view from the mountain reveals to me that mine is not the only way. And in its clarity I detect that there is no objective guarantee that mine is the better way.

My mountain teacher speaks, pleased at this brief insight, telling me that every person of every race and every partaker of every outlook has a way that is judged by that person as right.

What more, it asks, should I expect?

4. The Basis of Humility

Without thinking about it, I have been raised in a world of absolutes. There is a best automobile. A correct way to react to a given situation. A most attractive person in a room. A singularly appropriate attitude for every issue. In a disagreement between two persons, one is wrong and one right. Every social question has a right answer.

Numerous aspects of humanness can be categorized. Concentric layers of personality definition clothe us as we face the world like muffled Arabs.

The outer garments follow the lines of the group. Cloaks of religious outlook reflect a mixture of circumstance and personal selection. So, also, do tasselled garments of education.

Inner coverings conform more closely to individuality. Personal mannerisms are clinging fabrics that reveal hidden contours of personality. Attitude toward authority is a flowing veil hinting at the outlines of one's heart and mind.

Though I could not see it from the jostle of the crowded lowlands, the

clear air of the heights brings to my eyes the recognition that exercising my power of personal choice does not require that I judge the worthiness of others or the way they choose to do things.

A dynamic life requires that one evaluate the practices of other persons for possible adaptation to one's own use. This kind of openness is a doorway to rich surprises and expanding horizons. Strange odors give way to savory new foods. Distracting gestures transform into subtly descriptive forms of self expression. One expands.

To assess a person's practices for any other reason, however, would be to set oneself up in one's mind over that person, a subjective, meaningless, and potentially harmful act.

The assemblage of persons whom I accept as peers in the circle of humanity, though smaller than I would like, is expanding. I am helped toward this attitude by noticing a circularity associated with the attempt to judge others. What I direct toward another inevitably returns to me. If I categorize someone as insensitive, I am insensitive in the judgement. If I assess a person as uncaring, my opinion savors of uncaringness.

As a person, the most highly valued reality with which I make contact is personality. Thus compassion in its many faces—concern, encouragement, good will, sympathy—is the rational attitude of one personality toward another.

Volition is a measure of personality presence. To the extent that I choose for another, that person is not present as a volitional being. To encourage another to exercise his or her own volition instead of abandoning it is to nurture that individual as a person.

Should an individual's choice prevail over mine in matters affecting me, then even though I might endorse the theory of respecting the choice of

another person, how am I to accept that? Shall I have no choice over my own affairs? And where there is contention for resources, how shall it be decided?

These are not matters for me, but for the group, whose determination is neither right, wrong, nor absolute, but *ordinance*. Judgement is by its nature a group function; it cannot be executed by an individual; if attempted, it becomes something else.

Paradoxical studies in compassion come to mind, but they express limitations of perspective. For example, a terminally ill person desperately seeking citizenship to my land. And I desiring to help but believing it harmful to the country to admit terminally ill persons.

The view from the promontory reveals an immense patchwork of roles spread out over the countryside of human affairs. My chosen reaction in each decisional element of a situation depends on the nature of my involvement. If I am a maker of laws, I shall vote legislation in accordance with my beliefs. When my vote has been cast, then as an individual I shall help the needy candidate for citizenship within the recourse established by the group.

Once, long ago, my mother removed me from the solitude of our home and entered me into the care and companionship of others in a first-grade classroom. As I walked timidly into a room of bright-faced children, an unknown world mysteriously began to materialize around me.

It is like that again.

5. The Inner World

An inner world is beginning to reveal itself to me. The first feature that I perceive in this mysterious land is the mountain of high perspective, counterpart of the great material teacher on whose crown I now stand.

Mounting to its snowy peak, I soar above the obscurations of immediacy and partiality. I shall seek out other immense teachers to open up to me other aspects of this inner terrain.

Later in the year the annual leaf fall will begin. In a vast rainbow of moulting, dry leaves will twirl their indecisive ways to the ground. Like coy butterflies they will dart in minute feints this way and that in circuitous but inexorable descent.

I have read that the earth is immersed in an invisible ocean. That the ceaseless redirection of falling leaves is the result of the clear fluid of the atmosphere differentially resisting the passage of various aspects of the leafy surface. Picturing the fall of a leaf, I can recognize its likeness to that of a flat, heavy object dropping through a body of water.

Humankind, wearing the mantle of volition, inhabits yet another unseen ocean. A greater atmosphere. A sea of values vitalizing our humanness, quickening our hearts with a sensitivity utterly beyond the wide-eyed, innocent slumbrousness of animality.

The language of humanity has not been developed to deal with the things of the world of choice. Relevant concepts and words are lacking. But a consideration of the marvels of the physical atmosphere might suggest some of the magnificence overspreading that bright domain, of which our physical processes are only shadowy precipitates.

The atmospheric ocean is a complex structure of delicately joined components. Within its regions, endless reactions between forces of nature glow, sparkle, gather, and move.

In the *troposphere*, our immediate environment, drift cumulus and cirrus clouds. Topping this is the *stratosphere*, chamber of nacreous clouds and the ozone layer. Farther up, the *mesosphere*, lit in the night by fiery,

plunging meteors, flashing with the glow of noctilucent clouds lit from below by a sun hanging unseen under the brim of the dark horizon.

These are quiescent phases of the planetary air sea. Other atmospheric aspects speak of the dynamics of the bright world of choice.

Dawn arriving.

The heavens arching in quivering yellow.

Glittering, red-gold sun companions climbing the earth rim.

Fiery splendors playing in the high regions of the sky.

Glaring mock suns.

Shining sun pillars.

Dazzling sun halos.

Glowing glories.

At the moment of sunset, the fabled green flash scintillating in an emerald microburst and disappearing, its tart, lime vividness perceptible only through recall.

In the *thermosphere* and above it, in the *exosphere*, ceiling of the air ocean, the aurora borealis. A glowing, multifaceted, cosmic curtain, fired in the furnace of the solar wind, moulded by the terrestrial magnetic field into a blazing polar ring.

At the other end of the earth, the south pole wearing the luminous circlet of the aurora australis with equal glory.

6. The Nature of Choice

From atop my mountain overlook, I witness the earth as a whole and

also as its perfectly fitted parts. Downsweeping hills curve gracefully into valleys. Flowing meadows presage sleeping life soon to stir in planted fields. Cerulean skies find cool echo in flowing streams of Prussian blue.

The inner world, too, is flawlessly joined. A landscape of complex and harmonious design. There human life is actually lived.

Life might seem to be a succession of objects and situations swelling up, encompassing all, and fading into nothing.

And so it is, if that is what I believe.

But the actuality of my accruing being remains untouched by spoiling time, bloomed like a thousand-petalled rose beyond the crystal portal of the days in direct response to my day-to-day choosing.

For as I choose, so do I become.

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As one approaches a truth, one can observe it appear to contradict itself. As one draws closer, the apparent contradiction disappears. This is simply the phenomenon of a high reality interpreted in a reference frame of lesser altitude. It marks the transition zone from the lower to the higher vision of a particular reality.

For example, to choose for myself signifies that I do not choose for myself. Not in the sense of egocentric self-interest. Otherwise I would not be choosing but rather would be led by enslaving reaction.

Or to shape my being in the timeless land beyond the days, I do not try to shape my being, not as an absolute end in itself. To do so without higher ends would be to collapse the sky of my values onto my persona, becoming my own goal of attainment and beginning an inward spiral toward

infinitesimality.

From my mountain vantage, where the breeze whispers in unaccustomed purity and I see the world step out of the invisibility of vastness, I begin to detect that the nature of choice is not what I had supposed. Rather than *assertion* of self without regard to other selves, it is *exaltation* of self to include all other selves.

Choice is a cosmic reality of countless dimensions. It rises from a single point, spreading up and out to become an inverted pyramid.

In every fraction of every turning of the earth, the planet's billions of human beings are given one primal choice. Just one. Over and over.

They can choose to choose.

This is the quality raising us up from four paws. Our animal cousins look at us with plaintive eyes. They lack this choice about choice. It eludes their tactile world. They cannot perceive that at every instant we can be one of them or, donning the magical jewel of volition, which they cannot touch or see, transmute into something greater.

If I can marshal the presence of mind and power of will, I should like to ask myself this question consciously in each of life's situations: *shall I choose, or shall I react?* I feel that if I remember to ask, the answer shall always be for choice.

7. The Universal Unity

Reaction is action in which either values or meanings are not fully operative. *Choice* is the opposite of reaction. To *choose* rather than to *react* is to *discriminate in the factors behind selection*.

Interpersonal matters are the currency of choice. One halts descent into

volitional debt by refraining from judging other persons. Capital accumulates when one affectionately comes to view others as cherished resources to the species and to oneself.

This perspective emerges from the awareness that one's own interest does not contend with the interests of others, in fact is inextricably bound up with them.

A unity hovers over all things. In countless ways it joins them together, as on a smaller scale the hand of unity resides over my individuality. My many physical parts are one body. My several thought processes are one mind. My multitude of perceptions one awareness. My gathered aspirations one soul. At a higher level, these diverse realities are one being. Myself.

Below me the land undulates and leaps, breaking and gathering in its toiling climb up from the submicroscopic dimensions of the atom.

Though I do not see them from here, I can visualize clumped soil and pebbles beneath the terrestrial surface and imagine unseen layers of earth-folded granite.

The green and brown planetary covering of flora is a waving, organic banner of countless trillions of tiny, living plant cells joined in chlorophyll-centered community relationships.

My physical being, too, is the aggregation of living cells. Billions of them. Respiring, eating, reproducing. Some of them thinking. Perceiving.

All the living cells of my brain interconnect in a community of outstretched axonic arms. They live for one function: sentiency. My thinking is the supersummation of their thinking. My perceiving is their perceiving. They are the channel of my decision making, though I believe that a part of me exists anterior to their being.

How do my brain creatures, in their limited dimension of sentiency, view me? I occupy no space in their universe-that-is-my-brain. Diffusely and absolutely, I hover over them, encompassing their lives and their world.

Some of these diminutive intellectuals labor to formulate the concept, immanent in them, of the overbeing. Myself.

Certain of them perfect this concept as it emerges in my mind and finds its way to the page.

Teams of them mobilize as living repositories of each aspect of this concept.

Among their peers, those cell-beings who are invested with an awareness of my spaceless, incorporeal presence might be considered to be prophets.

Does this enstructuration of reality stop when it reaches humanity? Are not the individuals of our species also interconnected, by arms societal rather than physical?

“A larger life,” wrote Lowell, peering beyond his niche of space and time. “A larger life upon his own impinging, with swift glimpse of spacious circles luminous with mind.”

One can puzzle over the bounds of such a being. How, though, can I discuss this without stumbling into religious stereotype? Once my words have passed into the hearing of another, they are translated into the conceptual architecture and experiential framework of a different mind.

It is enough, now, to sense the universal unity and its bestowal of special kinship. To take heart, as Lowell assured with his poet’s heart, that that circling, larger life is “a grace of being, finer than himself.”

8. True Meaning

Ascending to the hilltop, I witness remote places shrink together and become undeniably one. Scattered environs contract into a single locality. Diverse scenery blends into a single land. Airborne birds wheel together as one magnificent flock. Snow melts on far-flung mountains, gathering into trickling streams and converging into a single, twisting river.

The enstructuration of things into one reality surpasses the limits of visibility. A single code of law converts incinerating logs into scorching light and brings the eagle to earth when it lowers its wings. With limitless jurisdiction, it impels the stars in fiery solitude across the heavens and wheels the bright galaxies along the velvet highways of space.

Animal behavior, human affairs, and physiological processes sink deep roots into one sustaining soil. All things that walk, fly, occur, rise, live, begin, and wait are interrelated in ways beyond number. They act and react in their immediate spaces, molecules in a shifting sea that reverberates with their endless doings.

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Choice is founded on values. And values are like the stars in the skies. Those who navigate by them view them better when they are grouped in meaningful patterns. And just as from my mountain overlook I might perceive a secluded glade more greatly within the framework of its containing forest, decision-making situations can sometimes be better evaluated in larger terms.

Perceiving true meanings—the significances of situational detail in terms of motivational values—can be complicated. Things are not always as seen in the immediate view.

I have decided that after I descend from the mountain and re-enter the day-to-day stream of life, I shall undertake a quest to identify my one supreme value. Subsequently I shall develop a hierarchical map of values that emerge from this ultimate motivation. Then, when confronting a choice that is difficult to evaluate, I can ask myself why I am doing this thing or that and refer to my ordered set of personal values for guidance.

True meaning exists only in interrelationships. Through these I transcend myself in the structure of existence. I am a leaf on a living tree. My greater significance actualizes as I gather light and water for the sustenance of root, bark, and branch.

9. The Hand of the Infinite

Movement at the scale of the mountain is always grand. It surrounds me now. The urgent array of firmament-challenging clouds sweeping swiftly. The massive, soundless flow of the sparkling river in profound procession. The echoing, ringing swoop of an exulting bird in the azure chamber of the sky.

I feel within and around me the world that has brought me forth and even now speeds along the currents of time. I sense the race that humankind runs through the vaulted corridors of physical, social, and spiritual evolution.

As I gaze out upon the wholeness of the land, I see reflected in it the unity beyond the crystalline portal of the days. The fields, the cities, they are the moving tip of the brush of eternity on the canvas of actuality.

Life steps its measured tread. The rains come and pass. Bittersweet, the years turn tenderly. Beloved and loving faces drift near and pass soundlessly

on.

But the hand of the Infinite holds it all, a matrix of exquisite beauty, an indescribable tapestry glimpsed from the high mountains of the soul. None of it is lost. All endures.

This I see from the mountain.

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The mountain breeze whispers a soft diminuendo, and the charge in the air stills. I see the radiance of a transformed world below. No longer do the plains clamor and threaten. Their fertility brims with opportunities to carry out decisions formulated on the peak of high perspective.

It is time to go.

Like all good instructors, the mountain labors to make its student independent of the teacher. My massive teacher has guided me to the true peak, which I carry within me. As I depart from the hill for the last time, it reveals one final lesson.

It shows me that it is not a teacher, only a mass of rock and earth. My teacher wavers and disappears and I stand alone in a way I have never experienced. But then a familiar strength touches me. It is my alpine teacher. It had resided in my inner mountain all the time.

Together we descend the rocky slope.

Two - The River

1. Free at Last

A light breeze touches my face as I look out over the river from a low prominence. October chills the air. Fresh from the mountain, I am oriented to the visual symbology of the alpine language. But the communication of the river is neither seen nor heard. The river speaks to a faculty of kinesthetic appreciation. Liquid torrents carry its ceaseless commentaries, phrased in circling vortices and wending meanderings.

The massive flow wears an urgent aura of unsettling disquietude hanging like a curling mist—communication, clamoring to be heard. To perceive the riverine message, I must become fluid, my thoughts resonant to change . . . velocity . . . acceleration.

The river nestles in the unity of the land, impossible of isolation from shore, hill, or overspreading sky. Is not human choosing, also, embedded in a larger design? It, and the river, can lose significance when isolated.

Choice is defined by a matrix of circumstance. Its power is to modify the circumstance, causing itself thus to be redefined by new detail. The kaleidoscopic streaming of metamorphosing situation is the playing board on which the checkers of decision are positioned by human will.

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The river surges into my sight upstream, out of the blue-cloaked mystery of origins. Like the river of terrestrial life, I think to myself.

Somewhere, three billion years up the life stream, a trickle of

microorganisms wove matlike stromatolites in the mud of an infant world. The trickle swelled and gathered. Hesitatingly at first, then enthusiastically, the hand of evolution experimented with organic enstructuration. Smooth-segmented trilobites swarmed onto steaming Cambrian plains. Jurassic sauropods rose up, followed by creeping reptiles and birds and later by a tumbling stream of dogs, beavers, rabbits, and peccaries.

Here, at the straightaway where I stand, humanity has arrived. Life has climbed out of the narrow well of the instant into consciousness that has the ability to be free of the bonds of programmed response. At last, the ribbon of unreeling time has endowed life with the power consciously to select values as the basis of action.

2. Beyond the Time Flow

But where do I search for a coherent basis of choosing? My inner landscape constantly heaves and re-forms in the ceaselessly rushing minutes and gathering years. Situational detail speeds down from all directions. Portentous conjunctions rise, brimming with promise, then disappear, carrying away the consequences of decisions I have made or neglected. And I remain in their wake, stripped of the opportunity further to affect those decisions.

To be devoid of a navigational sense of the torrent of temporality is to be captive to each circumstance, grasping at blurred goals as they bounce by, like a wandering child of Hamlin, bedazzled by tunes from an unseen Piper.

Shall I follow the drumbeat of educational endeavor banging at the windows of my soul? Or stride in cadence to the windy trumpet-call of professional aspiration? Empty gains may lie in those directions, poor substitutes for the fullness of the love of family and friends.

Should I choose a different current in the complex event stream, exalt a close circle of personal relationships, perhaps, above all else? A warm glow might ensue—but also, all too possibly, creeping awareness of a life narrowly distributed and an existence lacking in greater meaning.

Promising, but dimly understood, goals reach out slippery hands to me from within the swift waters. Patriotic undertakings. Group projects. Public service. But beyond the first comforting surge of relevance, how often hides the chilling reality of other, more sweet satisfactions, lost?

Always another decisional juncture. Shearing influences and pressures brought by other persons. Execute a purely rational decision and face charges of icy emotions. Give in to compassionate solicitude and gaze past at the lightless pit of emotionalism. Pleas and threats pound at the citadel of the will, squirming for entry. Like viruses intent on injecting their living patterns into the reproductive apparatus of protoplasmic cells, they attempt to force one to decide in ways not of one's own choosing, to supplant will with tendencies.

Never, I see now, never—if I guide myself solely within the reference frame of the roiling stream—can I transcend the wild flow and its confusing, shifting tensions. No choice-affixing formula could anticipate the factors of body, mind, and heart that uniquely imbue each situation.

Rocks lurk in the roaring temporal stream, rocks capable of smashing dreams. Short-lived and localized values are frail craft. As a man who contravened deep personal values on behalf of a political administration once mused when facing prison,

“Even empires fade.” . . .

From the stillness of the shore, I contemplate the coursing water. One can navigate a river by observing features on the land or in the heavens.

Can I steer through the river of time by looking beyond it toward timeless realities?

Suddenly I see the obvious, which for so long has eluded me. Lasting fulfillment can only come from setting goals that do not lose their luster with time. I must perceive and select changeless values to serve as the basis for my personal goals.

3. Time Unmasked

Gray trees line the banks of the river, their crooked fingers pointing skyward. I have come here before, in the deep of winter, wading through high-drifted snow to taste of crisp, black-and-white solitude.

It is in the barren seasons when tales are told. The featureless river, emboldened by the temporary plainness of the land, waxes talkative, endlessly lapping at the shore's ear with accounts of the life history of each fish it has spawned and the circumstances of the numerous creatures in its murky depths.

Narratives relating to the great custodians who tend the world mechanism have always thrilled me. Once I listened with wide, youthful eyes to descriptions of Jack Frost, pixie painter of the world's brilliant autumn leaves. Trudging to and from school, I sometimes half-expected to see him in the foliage, palette in one hand and brush in the other, working his chromatic magic.

I have learned from the Jack Frost story and a host of other traditions. Narratives about Odin and the Gods of the North and their Rainbow Bridge into Valhalla. About the fateful encounter of Paris, royal shepherd boy, with the Olympian goddesses Aphrodite and Athena and later with the besieging hordes of Agamemnon. About fiery tongues descending on the Apostles at

Pentecost two thousand years ago.

There is freedom in being able to evaluate segments of a claim on individual merits without compulsion to accept or reject the thesis as a total. The annual coloration of the land can be accepted whatever the cause, pixie or temperature. So, also, the concept of a variegated inner light of intellectuality and spirituality (like a rainbow bridge) leading one to an exalted state of being. Or appreciation of the profound discord that can ensue when one presumes to deal with divinity divided—a paradoxical contradiction in terms and an impossibility.

I can appreciate the excitement of the Apostles' preaching on the day of their visitation, whether the fiery tongues were figurative or literal.

Now I face a tradition about something called time, flowing invisibly, impalpably, metamorphosing what IS into what WILL BE. How can I hope to transcend a reality so vaguely defined?

In the river before me, vortices spin themselves into conical forms. They whisk about, then unwind themselves into nonexistence. Cyclical motion is a creator of illusion. An electron flashes around a circular route, spinning into being a hollow ball thousands of times its own size. A rotating fan blade weaves into existence a hazy disk of motion that can be touched.

Objects, I see, are balloons blown up into the world of form by internal motion. This line of thought, stimulated by the motions of the river, seems to be putting me on the trail of some kind of an understanding of time. It all has to do with motion. . . .

§

Suppose the motions constituting my life processes were to be slowed down by several orders of magnitude. In such a condition, my breathing

would come incredibly slowly and my words would drip from peculiarly unquivering lips like beads of molasses. Movement seeming slow to my associates would streak me by too fast for perception. To those around me, my life span would seem lengthened.

I, however, would see the world and everyone else speed up. I would see time accelerated.

Suppose my bodily processes had instead been miraculously halted for a thousand years as measured by a clock laid beside me in a secret cavern. Generations and empires might rise and pass as I lay in the hidden vault. The motions of time would grind my clothes into dust as minerals suspended in groundwater, dripping from the cathedral ceiling, erected calcareous icicles above and below me.

With the return of consciousness, I would feel as if no time had passed. But the clock beside me would belie my feelings.

Would time have been altered by this hypothetical manipulation of motion in my bodily processes—or only my perception of time?

§

Imagine an icy sphere of absolute zero temperature enclosing one-half of the universe, stopping all motion in it for a thousand years as observed by the other half of creation. If the frozen half of the cosmos could then be reconstituted and re-imbued with motion, the universe would subsequently be divided in opinion over the matter of the current time, each half considering the other to be in error in the amount of one millennium.

Time would apparently have gone on as usual in the warmer half of the universe; therefore, maybe only time perception in the colder climes would have been altered, and not time itself.

But what if the icy sphere were in concept to be drawn around the whole creation?

No clock would tick, no water droplet fall to the ground in all the hovering worlds. No grain of sand would shift. Throughout the vast, lightless galaxies, no wind would stir.

Were motion then to be resumed—or even were it not—would time have passed during the period of motionlessness? Would there have been a period of motionlessness? If so, how much? A second? A billion years?

Motion would have been stopped; and as a consequence, time—according to all possible tests and observations—would have ceased to be.

It seems that time is just a word for motion.

4. The Myth of Time

Years ago an eminent astronomer taught a university class in astrophysics. His tests were of the kind universally feared: only one or two problems, each involving subsidiary problems and numerous calculations. A miscalculation could cost one a test.

Once this professor returned to me a problem that he had graded as incorrect though my answer matched the one he had written on the blackboard. I inquired. Yes, he replied, my approach and answer were valid. But he stood by the grade. No credit.

Then this teacher gave me a personal lecture—a learning experience that has remained with me ever since. I had made one mistake, he said, committed one unacceptable error in judgement. I had chosen abstraction when more direct approaches were available.

And I had thought that abstract reasoning was desirable in science.

Not so, he said, not so. One should not willingly pursue theories beyond the bounds of clear visualization. Then, in earnest tones, he told me about some disasters encountered by scientists succumbing to the lures of abstraction. An upper atmospheric ion density calculation yielding ridiculous numbers because of an invalid assumption. An orbital calculation meant to use the gravity of a nearby planetary satellite for a whipping motion but that would have directed a spacecraft to within centimeters of the lunar body's center.

My teacher's appeal transformed my thinking. Ever since, I have been guided by his admonishment, experiencing freedom, certitude, and a certain joy in its simple power.

§

Now, contemplating the flow of the river, I evaluate the universally accepted story about the reality of time. I decide that I believe without believing. As a patron in a darkened theater enters an unfolding drama, remaining aware that it is fiction, I subscribe to the uncritically promulgated concept of time only conditionally.

Time is like a woolen blanket. A blanket might be considered real, but it is a derivative reality—a form, a pattern, not real to as primal a degree as the thread containing its substance.

Time is only relatively real, not to the same degree as space, mother of the motion summoning it into being. An instrument of artistic creation more dazzling than the magical brush of Jack Frost, time paints the universe in tones of hard and soft, large and small, planet and person. And I am a creation of its artistry, a drifting vortex, a pattern in its fluid substance as it burbles beside the motionless banks of eternity.

But I have more to learn about time and timelessness. There is more to this story, I know. For my heart, though it, too, is a pattern cast in the motional fabric of time, tells me with undeniable conviction that I can choose to be more.

5. Spun from the Timestream

The river has historically provided a vital lane of transportation and supply for communities dotting its shores. As with the land, so with the organism. Through the protoplasmic landscape of my living form flows a river adrift with tiny red barges. Their cargo is air, precious molecules of life-giving air. The cells of my body cluster along the banks of my circulatory system. As the magical compound floats by on living red platters, they scoop it up, quaffing its potencies and piling their combustive residues on the hemoglobin shuttles for transport back to my lungs to be exhaled.

I might appear to be the initiator and consummator of my basic life activities: breathing, eating, reproducing. But smaller hands than mine direct these pursuits.

Do I really assimilate the oxygen, as it seems? No. I as organism only convey it into the hollow of my lungs. From there my living cells take it on, transporting it through subcutaneous canals to their waiting dependents, who unlock its energies within their protean forms. And when I exhale, I merely release an accumulation of cellular outbreathings that have been consigned to me for disposal.

Thus I imitate, as an aggregate, the activities carried on by my small builders.

In taking nourishment, the similitude continues. I masticate the food and dispatch it to my stomach, but my Lilliputian sponsors actually assimilate

it.

Even sexual union is presaged in archetypical cellular roots. The male cell, racing through organic veils and along membranous causeways, sets the masculine example by finding and penetrating the female. She, in awaiting and receiving him and gestating their intergenetic offspring, lays out the feminine plan.

§

These thoughts illuminate my contemplation of the activities of life and time as the waters of the river stream past. A momentary breeze puffs my hair into a dancing, silken centipede which, its brief life spent, relaxes back into place. Rippling sounds flutter gently into my awareness as I consider the import of what the river is opening up to me. Facets of my humanness raise themselves up into my awareness from their shadowy, sheltered places and step forward, peeling off their disguises and standing revealed to me as echoes of a cellular universe.

My very nature as a human of the male sex, I begin to see, drifts up from microscopic ante-entities. In procreation, it is the straining spermatozoon who leaps frantically ahead while the ovum coolly waits. These differential attributes of being rise from the dichotomous bits of gendered life and soar up organic ramparts of enstructuration to collective expression. With primeval power they infuse man with a fiery soul to wax restive and invest woman with a fluid spirit to stand calm, imparting identity to place and situation.

Thus the drives of time construct me.

My body cells are in turn activated to their pursuits from deeper levels, submicroscopic regions where nascent motion stirs and aggregates into

whirring atomic particles. Where phantasmic spheroids encounter one another and embrace, weld themselves into vibrating molecules, pile up into sloshing chemicals.

At each consolidation, newer realities are born. Compounds mechanistically patterned and kinetically vitalized strike living cells into being, endowing them with drives and reactions. Tissues develop. Organs. And a human being steps forth, crisscrossed at multiple levels with a net of behavior spun from time itself.

Self-images of a lifetime are slipping from me as if they had never been. My precedents and primalities, my dependencies and sponsors, are at last becoming known. I am a creature of time spun out of the motions that comprise the timestream.

6. Transcend the Wild Flow

It thus might seem that my motionally born existence cannot transcend the timestream. That I can never penetrate past the temporal promptings embedded in the fabric of my being and attain choice based on timeless values.

But my teacher the ceaseless river instructs me otherwise. What I have received up to this point is only prerequisite to more things that I have not known.

To my mind comes a picture of slippery water molecules sliding effortlessly past one another in fluid unattachment. Under the right conditions, these freest of molecules (except for those of gases) can abandon their footloose existence for crystalline pursuits. Becoming builders of frigid fairylands, they blow feathery fingers of rime ice and, where space tumbles in profusion, pile glacial ice up into colossal arctic mountains.

Crystals embody motionlessness and hardness. Each elementary crystalline block of tetrahedral silicate comprises four atoms of oxygen hanging at the vertices of a diminutive pyramid and one silicon atom at its center. Internal motion manifest as intramolecular force binds these into a unit. Clusters of these submicroscopic prisms cling together, climb out of invisibility, become gleaming crystals—planes and angles reflecting the pyramidal arrangements of their invisible predecessors.

Motion, therefore, as in the frozen water and angular tetrahedral silicate, sponsors stillness.

And why not? asks my mind, in the vast assurance of afterthought. Does not every speeding orbit center around stillness? Does not substance contain atoms plus space? Motion, but stillness, too?

As I ponder these things under a cobalt sky folding softly around my motion-bound being and embracing the curve of the spinning earth, I come to understand that motion alone does not comprise time, but the silver and onyx of motion and motionlessness bound together as one.

Time and timelessness are my two primordialities, one creative of my being and the other consummative. My changeless sponsor, timelessness, is the wellspring of my aspiration to attain immutable values. My mutable forbear, time, who has produced me in this, my earlier phase, and to whom like a prodigal child I now have come, whispers tenderly to me in the surge and flow of the river, assuring me that with my multikinetic heritage, I can assuredly succeed.

7. Love - The Bridge

There is a quality of inexorableness in the river and its fluid massiveness. Ponderously it pushes, carries, and drags everything on its

surface and in its depths. Fish, boats, flotsam, all go where it directs, except as they might expend energies to determine, in some degree, their own destinations.

It would seem that there is no pushing the restless stream backward. But in formulating this thought, I am employing concepts. I should never forget this. Forward and backward are human inventions. Who knows the parameters that really constrain the world?

Did I have the sense, many years ago, of a river, when I was old and at the close of my life?

Yes, yes I think I did. Of being sped irresistibly forward. I had lived the years allotted to me. The fullness of my time had flown. I was old. Old.

§

“But is it here already?”

Astonishment in the realization.

“It went so fast, my life.”

I had one minute left to live. It balanced on the cutting edge of time, so small, yet so significant.

It shrank to a second. Then only a fraction of a second remained to me.

The death swoon. Dark water pouring from a broken vase. Senses stilled. No world. Consciousness fading.

Hanging suspended at the trailing tip of consciousness in the final microsecond, expanded in its intensity.

A question echoing through my mind in the lucid tones of my inner voice.

“Was there no purpose to my life?”

Then, one half of my mind becoming transformed, becoming my own objective judge at my time of death.

“What unselfish thing did you do when you were alive?” Emotionless. Commanding.

“I’ve done unselfish things.”

“What things?” Demanding.

But every apparently selfless act that my memory could summon up, I saw now, was tinged with self-interest.

No reason to lie. Who to fool now?

Intensely I searched my past. Replays flashing across my mind.

And my cry in the darkness.

“Oh, God, if I could only do it over!”

Then . . . living consciousness. I feel my body, the softness of a bed. My memories—not those of an elderly person, but of a man in his thirties.

Air fills my lungs and light frames the window.

Beside me, breathing softly, my dear wife.

§

I have been given a second chance. Never mind the details, never mind whether those forgiven years were dreamed or lived. The intensity and the truth are enormous.

I know what life is for and shall not be found wanting again.

For it is not one’s perfection in expressing the desire to do to good to

others, but that sublime desire itself, that links one to highest destiny. Such a desire is love.

A sense within me speaks, telling me that love is the bridge from time to timelessness, from the finite to the infinite. Love is the unity of infinity perceived by finite personality. Love is the tone in true choice and the luminosity in timeless values.

8. Truth - The Wayshower

As love is the light, truth is the way shower. For there is no falseness in love. Truth is the cosmic guide, a flickering point of light sparkling like a fairy presence in the shifting, invisible currents of time.

I shall develop a sensitivity to the diverse currents in the river of temporality which immerses me. They are my steppingstones. None is constant. Temporal understandings and situations change and vanish. But truth wafts from one to another, investing them briefly, lighting a succession of them in a transcendent path to the realities of the shore.

My view of truth is necessarily distorted by the temporality that immerses me like a turbulent, shimmering river. But time, I now realize, is no enemy. Time is the womb that has conceived, and now matures, me.

§

The river is my natural estate in this phase of my being, a dynamic world of opportunity, of metamorphosing potencies, where tadpoles become frogs.

Changeless truth glimpsed through the coursing timestream appears to shift. Truth as related to time is relative. To navigate the timestream under the

guidance of timeless values, I must remain pliant, must remind myself that goals, as I perceive them in my time-bound world, can be no more than flickering, inaccurate, unstable representations of changeless values. Dynamism must characterize my process of choice. No single current shall propel me to my destination, but a succession of them.

And I must realize that self-centeredness is not true choice and does not lend for survival or even for meaning in the rushing river of time. In the metamorphosing rush of temporality, where neither constancy nor fixity exists, the idea of an absolute frame of reference centering in oneself is absurd.

My basis of choice must be grounded in the concept of a consistency superior to myself, within which I am a small but significant element. I must be facile to select new goals as the flow of circumstance dictates. All must be projections of the timeless, underlying unity of which they are only my changing perceptions.

These insights of the river wash through my consciousness, echoing the refrain that choice is not the act of impressing one's will upon others. We each travel our own complex currents. Sometimes, for a while, we journey together. Then we diverge again to our own destinies.

§

Is it cowardly to employ flexibility in goal setting? Weak-willed to revise immediate goals as the tides change? Self-abnegating to give preference when possible to the choice of others? No. All of these personality movements are based on values that lie behind the fleeting moment.

Perception of the nature of choice evolves in each life. One person might render allegiance to its most rudimentary conception: materialistic

dominance. Another might pursue its highest temporal interpretation: high principles.

But beyond even principles, which are formulations of conduct couched in terms of temporal realities, hovers the way of timeless values—uncapturable, ever manifest through new sequences of principles and situations. This way is an invisible path, for it is transcendent truth, forever unformulatable.

But it can be lived.

9. A Child of Time

As the river draws me deeper into thoughts of its energetic wayfaring, I see that the stream of time is a highway. We humans, like frightened animals who wander out onto a thoroughfare, might be fearful or confused. But now my river teacher has taught me some things about temporality.

Riding the waves of time promises to be an invigorating adventure. I am somewhat inept now, a new traveler. But skill will develop. With experience, I shall become a long-legged water strider of time, skimming naturally and gracefully over the surface of the rushing event stream.

§

Is the water glass half full or half empty? Does reality lurk fiercely, or does it watch benevolently, from behind the temporal curtain? My answer to this directs my destiny.

I feel my relationship with reality suggested in Claude Monet's painting, "Childhood Garden." A child on a flowing path. Dapplings of light

and shade. Towering sunflowers. A friend nearby. Discreetly behind, a watching adult form. The natal home receding in the background. Overhead, bright blue space and fleecy white clouds.

I am a child. It is good if I take myself only so seriously. Worldly dignity is a postured thing. It stiffens one so that the river, instead of transporting, batters.

To draw timeless values from the event stream in the living of life is high art. Values pattern the soul. They shine in personal actions which, like reflected light, reveal the contours of one's being.

In my study resides a copy of "Diatonic Major and Minor Scales" for the classical guitar. It was written by Andres Segovia. In the introduction, he writes:

"Thanks to the independence and elasticity which the fingers develop through the study of scales, the student will soon acquire a quality which is very difficult to gain later; physical beauty of sound. I say physical, because sonority and its infinite shadings are not the result of stubborn will power but spring from the innate excellence of the spirit."

Sometimes I used to ponder his meaning. Then I saw it live. I was seated in a room with the man who had published these particular scales, a music publisher and instructor of the classical guitar. A staff member entered. Someone was in the store, he said (the publisher also sold guitars), and wished to see him. Ushered in, a young man related that he was expected to play at a party but, being a visitor to the city, had not brought his guitar.

Without a pause, the teacher said to his assistant, "Get the Tatay."

When it had been carried in, he placed the graceful instrument, trimmed with gleaming silver, into the visitor's hands and said quietly, "Play."

Leaning back, he gazed up at the ceiling, nodding as the youth's hands drew out melodious streams of the compositions of Carcassi, Villa Lobos, and Beethoven.

As the last crystal note hung over us, the teacher spoke to his assistant, "Let him take it," and turned back to me.

I wondered about the connection in that extraordinary teacher's mind, and in the mind of the maestro whom he so revered, between musical beauty and human character. Even in my puzzlement I was moved at the event and its quiet elegance, knowing that something had happened for which I had not had the eyes.

I know now that it was not the skill of the visitor to which my teacher had listened, but truly the person's spirit. For one cannot disguise the product of one's heart.

In that simple act he was a greater teacher than I understood.

A friend once confided to me about visiting a police station to attend to a traffic ticket. Surrounded by policemen and bustling activity, he had felt a surge of gratitude that they were faithfully carrying out their function. Not as officers, but in obedience to some higher mandate of being.

Everyday living is not meaningless. A gift may be temporal, but not necessarily the giving. It depends in large part on the intent of the giver. Innate drives, though they are but brush marks of time, can be used to express timeless values. They are the vessels of the soul's expression.

Time streams through the ages, raising up worlds and races. Its passage in the lives that it creates brings forth a song. Comprehending the tune, one can sing it sweetly, even evoke joyous recognition in others.

The breeze is beginning to turn cooler. With a start, I realize that my

contemplation of the river has ended. Under the tutelage of the river, I have found a second element of the inner landscape of choice. At the foot of the mountain of high perspective, I have found the river of transcendent becoming.

Three - The Ocean

1. Return to the Source

Calmness is a blue wash that surges before me to the horizon. I have come home to the ocean, from which all creatures ultimately spring. The salt-laden breeze invigorates me as I stroll barefoot upon the sea-rimming sand, gazing out over the fluid vastness, thrilling to the inexplicable sense of soul-felt familiarity which the ocean instills.

This is the fateful meeting. I have known so all along. One may receive instruction from the soaring mountain or the wending river and remain unchanged in one's essence. But the mighty sea, ancient source and tender of all planetary life, will allow no such aloofness.

My coming here was inevitable, I think to myself. As my eyes sweep up from the cobalt surface to the mist-swollen clouds above, I ponder the workings of the great, globe-spanning, terrestrial hydrologic cycle. Employing diverse powers, this metamorphic waterwheel raises vapors from the ocean, gathers them into clouds, wrings out raindrops over the planet. Pursuing age-old tasks of collection and disbursement, it urges fallen rain into rivers, which it conducts through blossoming lands to accrue in reservoir oceans.

I have lived such a fluid progression. Like a raindrop come to earth, I poised upon the crown of the towering mountain, then sought the swirling press of the tumbling river. Now I trudge the shore of a silver-splashed ocean as silicon microspheres crunch beneath my feet and mantle the sea in a collar of gleaming purity. Above the liquid surface, circling gulls cry sharp

mewings into the windy hand that sustains their flight, while below them, long, sparkling swells roll shoreward.

Here is the fullness of what I glimpsed through the eyes of my other immense advisors. From here all things emanate: the noctilucent clouds pondered from the mountain, the evolving procession of life considered from the river, all rising from here, assuming diverse forms.

This plumbless progenitor of life completely encompasses its myriad creatures, radiated bits of life who perceive their vast parent as environment. As provider. As source. Silvery fins cleave its buoyancy-giving depths, which support countless smooth bodies engaged in a fluid matrix of maneuverings and travelings. Nutrients drift everywhere. In the sea depths, wind disappears. Storm vanishes. Only the nurturing remains.

Ocean, I know where you are taking me. You move my heart in a way more real than words. Your speechless eloquence transports my soul to the depths of the universal ocean of being.

This limitless oneness that my seeking heart encounters on the peaceful beach presses upon my awareness with an intensity, not of violence, but of absoluteness of being. Inspired by the heaving blue sea before me, I am contacting the true reality of my being. And I learn about unity.

Unity is the ultimate of being. A unified consciousness is a mind. A unified organism is a person. A unified creation is a—but why put a word to it? It is more of a person than a person, more of a being than a being. It is what we reflect in our individualities and also in our collectiveness.

Am I touching God? Yes. I am experiencing the ground of my being, the presence of the Infinite: the limitless, beginningless reality from which all things come and in which all things consist.

2. The Two Keys to Eternity

I suppose I knew all along somewhere, below the swirling surface of my consciousness, that the search for values would lead to the realm of universal unity. But in my case, it required the high perspective of the mountain and the event streaming of the river to lead me to it. I have always had difficulty in relating to an impersonal universal unity. Now I perceive that absolute unity is, by definition, absolute personality—plus.

In the presence of this spaceless, timeless unity, even the word, God, seems demeaning. This source of all beings, this one absolute being, towers above word-names formed by human lips. Now that I perceive the object of my search, how do I consummate my quest? How do I unify with the absolute unity? To do this would be to associate my very being with the ultimate of values. The absolute of timelessness. The supreme of meanings. In the intensity of being that I am encountering, I see clearly that to establish and maintain a relationship with the Infinite is the purpose for which I was created.

What ritual on my part shall seal the accord? What deed or word shall set my feet on the path of endlessly true choice? Where is the key to this door of infinite unity?

I shall look to the ocean for answers. It has brought me this far and will not abandon me. In my imagination, I travel to the inmost depths of the sea. From all sides press the forces of fluid containment. Ceaseless currents course past me, seeking mysterious destinations. Temperature gradients ripple up and down the thermal scale, prickling my senses. Everywhere, in this heaped liquidity, marine commerce bustles, as beings great and tiny swarm, forage, hunt. The mightiest of them, the blue whale, drifts in majesty, straining gushing water through baleen to obtain nourishment in the form of

one of the smallest, the ubiquitous krill.

Huge cycles drift across the waterborne populace. Periods of light and dark punctuate the flow of existence. Warm follows cold and returns to warm, and calm stirs to turbulence and recedes once again to calm, as circling passages grip the watery world in irresistible sway.

Each marine dweller sustains a give-and-take relationship with the sea. Their taking is accomplished with the biologic equivalent of trust. In nonintellectual innocence, they assess that the upholding liquid will respond to splashing fin or flipper, to waving tendril or cilia, by impelling them toward their destination. In unwavering faith, they anticipate that the transparent blueness holding them will deliver them sustenance after sustenance.

Each denizen gives to the sea as well, with the same tenacious honesty with which it expects that the sea gives to it. This reliability in giving is the biologic precursor of sincerity. The shrimp, a multi-segmented crustacean, keeps reliable habits; the sea may consistently draw upon it to feed the wandering sea bass or the hunting grouper. The equally reliable shark labors unremittingly, removing waste from the ocean's alleyways.

I, too, must give life to sincerity and trust, not only embedded in my biological function, but also blooming in the rarified heights of intellectuality and spirituality. These are necessary foundations for the relationship that I now seek with the Infinite.

3. The One Most Worthy

The sea spreads all ways in vastness. Uncapturable in its wholeness, still it is unequivocally one. This mirrors the truth that the Infinite is one; if it were not so, no relationship with infinity would hold meaning. But I have

seen, in the depths of my soul, that the Infinite is the maximation of unity: a person.

Until this moment, my ideas of divinity have been haloed in the mist, perhaps, of too many competing models born in too many minds, in too many ages of humankind's history. A sense of remoteness and sophistication seems inevitably to crystallize around any attempted description of one's insight. The simplicity and immediateness of the reality, like the sun in the blue sky, are left behind. It is like the million starbursts of life swimming interminably throughout the ocean depths. One may describe them, but the soul of the reality remains in the ocean. It does not transmit.

Thus I perceive, for the first time, the intimacy and reality of my relationship with the Infinite: that of a child and a parent. It is so uncomplicated. Infinity has produced me. I am literally a child of the universe. Crafted by an unseen, loving hand, today I walk the earth in this body. Think with this mind. Tomorrow I shall slip from these vestments in cosmic nakedness, wrapped only in the character I have built, and speed, like a dawning thought, through the starry interregnum of his creation to the galaxy, world, body, mind and life that the Father-Infinite has ordained for me.

Knowing his love for me, I shall go gladly, giving all of myself sincerely and trustingly. How else can one transmute from one phase of being to another, except to leave behind all clinging to the vanished past and to limited, personal ambition?

Unity with the Supreme Person, I perceive, is not submergence of identity. It is association with divinity. Exaltation of being. Uplifting of purpose and value. My part is to trust, his to fulfill.

Realizing this, I understand for the first time the quiet peace with which

Chuang Tzu must have confided, twenty-three hundred years ago:

If He takes me apart
And makes a rooster
Of my left shoulder,
I shall announce the dawn.

If He makes a crossbow
Of my right shoulder,
I shall procure roast duck.

If my buttocks turn into wheels
And if my spirit is a horse,
I shall hitch myself up and ride around
In my own wagon!

In my search for values, I have come upon the value of values and the source of all value. To think of incorporating into my life values that articulate with the values of the Infinite is breathtaking. Meaning upon meaning would buttress my being and relevance imbue my undertakings—relevance, because my undertakings would ultimately be God's undertakings, though they be but the tiniest threads trailing from the cables of his purpose.

As these thoughts cross my mind, I remember a tale I read long ago. The abbot of a Tibetan monastery had reached an age where he had decided that he must turn over the reins of spiritual leadership to someone younger. Therefore he interviewed each of the monks in his monastery, asking each, in turn, the question, "What is the meaning of life?"

Each priest, when polled, produced a personal and elaborate theory for the abbot. Still the old monk continued his search, for none had yet proven

himself equal to the task of spiritual leadership. Having interviewed all of the monks in his monastery, the abbot then queried the servants, finally calling a certain kitchen helper into his private quarters.

“What is the meaning of life?” he asked the servant. Without a word, the kitchen helper knelt down and removed one of his sandals. Rising, he placed the sandal on his head and, smiling, walked from the room.

The abbot chased after him down the hall, calling excitedly: “You rascal! All these years here, and you never made yourself known to me.” The abbot subsequently turned over the leadership of the monastery to the kitchen helper.

This always seemed obscure to me. But now I suddenly see. A sandal is designed to hold a foot. The sandal on the kitchen helper’s head held an infinite foot, beneath which the man was voluntarily and totally subservient.

No ritual is necessary, I see now, to seal the relationship, only my heartfelt decision to uphold my part. He is always carrying out his part. Have I not known this always, in one form or another?

4. Trust Transcended

Gazing down the beach and back through time, I see a different beach. The year was 1968, and the social restlessness and adjustment that periodically grip our democracy were in bloom. It was the year of the flower child, of the distrust of institutions, of yearnings for the materialization of the invisible unity behind all things.

Though respectful of those youthful outpourings, even then I sought growth in my own way, individually and privately. So it was that I walked the shore of a deserted beach that day under a subtropical sun, alert for the

lesson that nature would bring. A small, dark object moved near my feet. A newly hatched sea turtle, still wet from the egg. Rapidly it slid across the sand. Under the urging of drives fashioned at the dawn of life, it sought union with the sea, even as I now do with a greater ocean. Tiny flippers, textured with delicate, olive-brown beadings, stroked the hot sand rhythmically in swimming motions as it scooted along in a series of jerks.

Though it did not know it, danger threatened. The cool wetness that the animal sought lay not before it—but behind. The hatchling's urgent race pointed up a sandy slope to a highway and the terrible wheels of passing automobiles. Beyond lay parched sand and dry weeds—no ocean anywhere.

I did not wish to interfere. The journey of discovery was an important part of the turtle's birth. But I picked the gently rocking infant up with two fingers, unnoticed by it in its intense pursuit, and walked into the waves. The tiny flippers swam through the air as we went.

Beneath the surface where I stood in two feet of water, coral outcroppings lay visible—perils against which the surging undertow could smash a vulnerable body.

For a moment I hesitated, but then released the turtle below the surface, out of reach of the frenzied waves. I did not know if the little turtle could breach the barrier between the world of land and sea, could breast the powerful undertow and sharp coral to reach calmer depths. Even if it could, another danger remained. Will it swim out to sea—or back to shore? I wondered. I could not protect it, could not shield it from the flowing violence. That would deny it the destiny that sang in every curve of its streamlined body.

The sea-baby's flippers caught the surging fluid for the first time. Without pausing, it pushed forward into the wateriness which tossed it about

even as it determinedly struggled in farther. Quickly it moved out to sea. I caught a few brief glimpses. It would disappear in the roiling liquid, then appear again momentarily, farther out. Then it was gone. Somewhere not far ahead of me, I knew, it was swimming with exhilarated strokes in ever-calmer, sheltering depths, to its future life.

The innocent bravery and genetic wisdom of the baby sea turtle that I encountered on the beach that day have inspired me. Tiny beyond measure and fragile in comparison with the enormous, heaving sea, still it knew its place and without hesitation entrusted itself to the vastness of its great, watery mother.

Through that encounter, I have been born into the fraternity of the sea turtle. With saurian wisdom I know that I can accept my destiny and, with supreme trust, embark into the great sea of the unknown. As I ride the currents of life into mysterious and threatening domains, I will take heart from the cheerful inspiration of the young sea turtle on the beach that day so many years ago.

5. Unity Comprehended

As I ponder the relationship between the ocean and its creatures, considering the total spontaneity with which each gives every shard of itself to the others, I am beginning to learn about unity. One commonly thinks of unity as a form of mutual interest, as in the unity of the members of a club. But this is not a unity, not a cosmic reality, but a taxonomic invention, a concept only, an idea of a type that mathematicians call an intersection. No special bonds of reality reach out and interconnect persons or things just because one decides in one's mind that they share a common trait.

Mathematicians converse, in their essays on jointness and disjointness,

about something called a union. Unlike an intersection, a union is a reality, one that comprises the combined totality of its members. I observe a union before me now, extending to the horizon like a rippling sculpture of textured glass. It is the ocean, a reality consisting of the union of countless drops of water, each of which, withholding nothing of itself from the joining, has vanished as a discrete individuality.

A union is not quite right. It is not a unity, not the rare relationship whose whisperings stir at my intuition, just beyond the light of conscious recognition. It is something else. I sense this strongly. A unity must be a continuous joining of separate realities, and this cannot be so in a situation where the separate realities have, in their joining, ceased their individual existences.

With this realization, I perceive in a flash the additional characteristic of a unity that is not found in a union. A unity, I perceive now, amid a bright thrill, is a special kind of union, in which the members, though offering up all that they are to their oneness, still retain their individuality. Members of a family ideally share all of themselves, yet retain their individuality—as also do persons unreservedly committed to a common spiritual cause.

Synergistic power, it is therefore clear, flows into true unities, charging them with qualities not found separately in the members. A unity is a cosmic reality. It possesses its own objective existence. Like an organism, it harbors in its unseen depths a pool of attributes that emerge only as they are needed. Specific talents and resources of the members come to play on behalf of the unity only as the situation dictates. Like an organism, a unity thus adapts to its environment.

Under the vast tutelage of the ocean, I am beginning to perceive that a unity is the highest of all relationships. Our world hardly recognizes unities.

Much easier to perceive have been taxonomic categories, qualifications of being that define areas not of selflessness but of self-interest and uniformity. The primary impetus to mobilization throughout the history of the human species has always been self-seekingness through identification with others of a given category, whether it be race or social class, gender or age group.

The awareness of this reality, the concept of a unity, sweeps through my consciousness like a Gregorian chant, trembles in musical mutters, profound whispers, flashes of insight, glows of promise. A unity stands revealed to my inner gaze in only its major outlines, but these, in their bright luminance and noble lines, are sufficient to reveal that it is a selfless giving that results in an exaltation of the unifying members.

6. The Infinite Parent

The sea permeates all that inhabit it. Minerals that drift through its formless substance infuse marine creatures with properties. Life-sustaining oxygen bubbles from its hidden folds into its dwellers, upholding their essential vitality. Even the forms of its swimmers, smooth and graceful, echo the flowingness of the sea.

A visualization of the Infinite as an affectionate parent is short of the true relationship, I know. But the relationship that I now sense, with increasing discrimination, is at least this and inevitably more. Finite mind can never completely comprehend the more-than-finite.

The concept of the Infinite as my parent vibrates with connotations. Among these intense bursts of meaning is the perception of the Infinite as my source. This does not designate simply an event that happened and is done, as in the human experience of biological conception. It encompasses conception, but more. As tiny fibers of Manila hemp uphold the thread that is

their assemblage, and as they in their identity as the fibers and also as the thread uphold the higher-level twine, then the bulking strands, and finally the thick rope, so the Infinite in the form of nascent forces, energies, and materials upholds my being in and with his being at every instant.

Each one of my cosmic qualities is upheld by, and in, a corresponding quality of the Infinite. But I exist and act as more than just a slavish piece of his cosmic body. This is so because among his qualities sparkles the jewelled treasure of free will. And uttering the mandate of my emancipation, his limitless, boundless, free will ordains and upholds my free will. I am a bird. On the high wind of noncausal being I soar—flying, dipping, turning, and traveling as I choose—with the wings of volition. Thus his hand sets me apart from the inert imprisonment of the valley, the plain, and even the towering prominences of the earth. My volition circumscribes my private realities and constitutes me an individuated reality. A person.

7. Destined for Eternity

The waves scud over the trembling sea mass, whispering to me with watery lips. With each swishing utterance they reiterate the amazing truth that has emerged to my vision, that union with separateness is the sublime secret of unity. This is the lesson of the ocean.

As the sea flows tranquilly through its deep turnings, wafting all things within it in harmonious, billowing cycles, so does unity manifest through its members in graceful actions of cooperation. Unity is invisible to the eye, but it is perceptible to the mind and spirit as an inexplicable harmony over, and between, its members.

The ocean is harmony embodied, even amid the apparent ragings and contentions that play out within its encompassing bounds. Even the violence

between predator and prey, when viewed with eyes attuned to age-old cycles, gives way to the higher perspective of the harmony of the species. The ecological balance scales take reverently from some individuals so that members of their cousin species, also, may survive the tides of time.

In any contest, I must learn to look not only upon the contestants, but also to the higher level, where contenders are not adversaries, but partners. The immediate view, though important, is less significant than the higher framework. Its value, by comparison, is relative.

I see, now, as I drift, in my imagination, through the sheltering, crystal-blue ocean depths, that all things join together in unity in one way or another. The manner in which each accomplishes this determines what each is. Like a sudden, shimmering gong summoning forth the voice-configured pattern of a mantra, my sense of the Infinite, enhanced by my ocean teacher, suddenly reveals to me that the olden seers were describing a true reality in their teachings about universal unity.

With this understanding, I come into the knowledge of an incredible but incontrovertible fact: that it is written in the books of eternity that I shall unify with all things. And it is, I see, up to me how I shall do this. I can join the universal unity as a volitional being, as myself—or, alternately, depending upon my choosing, as my impersonal elements, my mass.

If I should choose to remain aloof from the universe and its beings, pursuing solely the things of self, then my unity with all things would be a lower reality, consisting merely of the obedience of my body to the physical laws of the cosmos.

But if I should choose unity, should subserviate myself to the creation and its creator, then, through this continuing action of volition, my mind and soul, while continuing to be individual realities, would also become one with

the cosmos. I would become an agent of universality and infinity and a friend and child of God, as well as a server of all about me. This relationship, articulating with the values of the Infinite, would be eternal.

8. Divinity Perceived

For the Infinite to unify with a finite creature is an unimaginable partnership of being. But my ocean teacher tells me that this is true, that the Infinite Person experiences volitional sentience with a million personalities, walks the earth with a billion feet, gazes up at the galaxies embedded in his own being with a trillion creature eyes. Every one of my trials, joys, and experiences, he shares with me, in all of their fullness.

It might seem that there are multiple unities inhabiting the corridors of being; and there are, relatively speaking. But as I gaze upon the all-encompassing ocean, with its speeding currents, dizzying vortices, and yawning depths, I recognize that all unities are members of larger unities. Ultimately, one unity cascades down from infinity like a giant waterfall, a substance of infinity that manifests in ever-more-derivative unities.

This all-encompassing, ineffable unity, I recognize with sudden understanding, is what humankind refers to in hushed awe as divinity. With transcendent power it holds its ardent devotees fast and intimately. Perceiving this, I become aware that divinity—unity—inhabits an existential, changeless dimension which impinges upon our evolutionary realm of time and space as activator. Indweller. Immanence. It is the flame on the bush that crackles and burns but does not consume and is not consumed. The boundless ocean of unity is an ocean of energy, in reality the precursor of energy.

9. The Infinite Person

Now I recognize that the vast overbeing of whom we are all a part, whose astronomic visage I have glimpsed during my encounters with my montane and riverine instructors, is not the Infinite. Like us, he is a being in the ocean of life. Part god and part creature, he is the reflection of each to the other, the summation of the finite, the encompassor of all of time and space. This larger person—and we—are experiential expressions of the Father-Infinite, who projects into and upholds many planes of being in his immense creation but, being existential and boundless, is not of it.

The magnitude of the picture before me is stunning. It would be dismaying to discover the immensity of that which my finite mind can never truly understand, if I did not know of the Father's love for me. Though I cannot know all of the details about my infinite Father, I can know him qualitatively. His personality blazes in the God-knowing men and women through the ages who have revealed him through exemplifying him in their lives. Through them, we perceive him as through a lens.

The greatest portrayal of the Infinite Person was given when he walked the earth as Jesus of Nazareth. Knowing the personality and spirit of Jesus as they were exhibited to the eyes of humankind, I come to know the personality of the Infinite. Thus I am assured in the warmth, character, love, and accessibility of the God of Infinity, assured that he values me as an individual, assured that he cherishes each of his children and has laid great plans for us.

10. Transformation

It is peaceful here on the seashore, as twilight gently approaches. The sun's topmost curve takes one last look over the rim of the world, as faint darkness paints the sky. Contentment warms me. My long search, my intense

quest, is finished. I have learned, from the ocean, the final motivational lesson, been presented with the ultimate value. Now, I know, I shall be able to exercise choice based on true values.

It seems strange, in a way. Such a profound and far-reaching readjustment to my life. Attained so quietly. But only part of it has been attained, I suddenly realize; for as this thought plays through the reverie in my mind, awash with contentment, the ocean interrupts with one last communication. Its echoes grow quieter, but will, I know, never cease to be. For the nature of the communication is one of disquiet rather than quietude. The sea is alerting me to more work ahead, much more work, is informing me that, in the experiential sense, the quest is not finished, but only now just begun.

For, my watery advisor tells me, a unity has three parts—is not just one featureless togetherness. All three phases exist simultaneously. At the first and lowest level are the members of the unity in their individual wholenesses, as they live and function without regard to the unity. This is the level that maintains the respective individual identities so necessary to the unity. The second level is the members as one: indivisible, indistinguishable. This level is existential in nature—not truly existential in terms of being beginningless and endless, but rather in terms of being non-evolutionary. This phase is the commitment to unity. It springs into full-blown being in an instant. It is qualitative—not quantitative. The commitment simply exists or does not.

The third level is the evolutionary level. It is the phase of relationship, adjustment, adaptation, growth. Here the members, who exist in individual fullness at the bottom level and are bound together through the existential commitment of the second level, modify their reactions, smooth out their rough corners, and give expressions of varied social interaction to their unity. A unity of three persons, I perceive, would embody seven different

expressions at this level, all of which, over time, would progressively develop new techniques of harmonious interaction. These seven expressions would be: each of the three as individuals, the three possible pairs of members in the unity, and the three all together.

But it is enough now. The experiential can wait. It is the sea upon which I gaze now, and the sea represents the existential reality. From its gathering presence, I shall charge my being with the energies of infinity. Here, I shall contemplate the oneness, take on the peace and tranquility to sustain and activate me when once more I shall enter the world of evolution.

The world and the heavens wrap themselves around the beach whereon I contemplate these things, and I come to realize that the ocean in the unseen, bright world of choice, to which this physical ocean has introduced me, is the ocean of universal unity. And as I contemplate, I do more. I mutate. To exemplify values, one must change not only what one knows, but also what one is. To this end I remain here for a brief time, a creature in the ocean of universal unity, experiencing and reinforcing the presence and function within and around me of the unity of all things.

Four - The City

1. Toward the Real

The city lays upon me like a wrap. Coiling around the grassy park where I relax, it borders my green sanctuary in a weave of sound and color. Its uniqueness is not structures or streets, but people. For the city is a place of presence, where one is never alone. Here artistic lines of buildings voice lingering communications from vanished architects, while streets and brickwork offer up ceaseless greetings from laborers long since gone. Each aspect of the city, stemming from individual minds, is ultimately a social intent, a transpersonal implication.

I know what the city represents in the unseen realm of choice; no mystery remains in my search; that phase is past. Before me lie the secrets of experientializing my commitment to unity, which I sealed on the shore of a silver-spangled sea. The city represents selfless service.

In the city, one's every action maintains part of some relationship, sometimes with persons one sees, sometimes with persons one does not see. Walking, in the city, is a juggling accommodation with other riders or walkers of the travel stream. In stopping for a traffic light or occupying a park bench, one engages, across the crevasse of time, in a relationship with persons who installed these interpersonal vessels for one's use.

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Leaning back on weathered green slats, I observe the park strollers, the city pacers, the many bustling passersby. People everywhere. All varieties. Interacting in countless ways. Relationships, I realize, as I look out from my

vantage place in the peaceful, green preserve, are the city's fabric. I must understand them if I am to function here.

At the center of the little park stands a life-size goddess. A Diana in peeling gilt. The spotty variations in tone and texture brushed into her skin by the passing days imbue her with a patina warmer and richer than any artificer ever could produce. The fingers of her left hand affectionately touch the back of a small deer, which nuzzles daintily against her. Gleaming in the sun-baked park, she presides over a waterless fountain in which it was intended by the designers that she should stand just above the level of the water.

Diana, what can you tell me? I wonder.

On her head perches a saucy mockingbird—a real one. With his back turned, his flicking tail juts out over her nose like some strange, unorthodox headwear. Tilting toward her back, he peers down behind her, exposing his bottom above her golden forehead as if to remind the unnoticing passersby of what is real and living and what is fictional and inert. Then, off on his rounds, he flits to a lamppost, trills a medley of winged calls, and moves to a small tree.

Diana watches impassively, unembarrassed by this demeaning of her dignity. But then what else can she do? It is the bird—not she—who embodies life. And I perceive, as I contemplate the scene before me, a truth. This undertaking of mine is real. So real that I must guard that the idea of orienting myself toward universal service does not catch me up and, like a gilded face, turn me to it as an end in itself, overshadowing those I would serve.

Just so, trills the little mocker—the real life of this scene—as if he had heard my thoughts.

2. Soul of the Server

Deeper in the urban bloodstream than just generalized relationships is cooperation. Cooperation is the brain of the city. Functional harmony welds individuals into a single, humming, social mechanism. In one's every move here, one extends, and receives, cooperation. Tracing out checkerboard streets and walkways, one dances one's part in the streaming traffic ballet. One's garb is a badge of conventions agreed to by the populace, modified by one to a mutually accepted degree to express personal individuality. Commerce, law, transportation, recreation—all activities of the city are the blossoming of cooperative relationships inherent in the species.

It is up to me to learn the art of cooperation, in its many subtle aspects, if I am to become one who serves. To this end I attend, with anticipation, to my urban teacher, who speaks out of the collage before me, through many tongues but with one voice.

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Lunchtime has arrived. In the distance, office buildings rear up like pylons embedded in a living, variegated garden of informality that defies the crisp intent of their architects. Sandwich eaters garbed in the many colors of a vegetable patch perch on rails and low walls. Vendors of food and trinkets defy the sacrosanct air that the huge buildings and their formally attired workers would convey.

Planners and architects, I recognize, cannot force those who live in the city to utilize its precincts in exactly the way they had in mind—any more than a gardener can require flowers to take on the attributes he or she prefers.

I, too, like a city planner or a builder, might draw up ideas that I would like to see materialize in connection my service, might imagine how

beneficiaries of my work should respond. But the work is for them, not for me. It is not necessary even for them to know that I render them a service.

If they should come to know, would I think less of them were they to take their gifts without ceremony, leave without expressing thanks or appreciation? I must remember why I perform the services, not exact any requirements upon the beneficiaries—otherwise, I do not give, but rather seek to take from them.

3. Beyond Old Images

As I ponder these teachings which the city is revealing to me, I perceive that the lessons I shall learn here in the habitations of humankind will be less glamorous and more pragmatic than those of the places sculpted by the hand of nature. But this is where I am fashioned to work, the environment where I belong. And whether I perceive it as glamorous or mundane, always must my service rest upon the combination of motivation, which I have learned from the ocean, and alertness of purpose, which I have now learned from the city.

This is a different idea of service than I had anticipated, this visualization of something given in many fashions, largely unobtrusively. Studying the persons passing by my wooden perch, I perceive all manners of human disposition, temperament, motivation, and circumstance. I had not foreseen that it would require tact on my part to pass on my gifts, whatever these gifts may be. But this is the human condition, this fact that not all that is offered is accepted. And rightly so. A gift is for the recipient. The fact that a person wishes to give something is not in itself sufficient justification that another person should accept it.

A real need must exist before service can be born. And to be service, an offering must be desired by the recipient or should be one that by its nature does not require acceptance. A friendly smile or the reassurance of personal worth can be proffered whether or not it is acknowledged.

In serving, one must overflow with energies of friendly intent which, constituting perhaps the best part of the gift, spill over to surcharge the other. One cannot require that the benevolence flow from the recipient to the server; that would be setting a price one one's gift and also requiring that the recipient be fortunate enough to be endowed with the strength of good intentions.

As the harmony of the ever-changing crowd becomes visible to my perception, I recognize that though the energy of benevolence flows through the server, it does not originate in the server, but in God, who vitalizes, strengthens, and sustains all things.

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Always in this conjoint work with the Infinite, which I perceive lies just ahead of me, must I stabilize and orient myself by asking myself with regard to each task: why do I do this thing? It is vital that I do not stray from the intent. Meditation and prayer, I perceive, will be my lifeline to the higher reality that I serve.

What will my service be, this giving, upon which I am planning to embark? Will I follow the formulas of a particular organization or philosophy, perhaps join myself to a corporateness, function as an arm or a leg of a specific social benevolence?

Perhaps. But not as an end in itself. Only, at most, in passing. My path is fixed through endless futurity. Here and there it may follow well-traveled

lanes; but my course is unique to me, set by the hand of the Almighty. There are no formulas.

4. Oneself as Gift

A few blocks from the park where I contemplate these things, I see two vacant lots, still scattered with bricks that had been buildings. Near them stand the hulking remains of a partially demolished department store, still adorned with the glistening marble and ornate embellishments of another time. Through their condition, these deteriorating urban features portray the dynamic nature of the city. Although a community embodies physical and social structures, it is always changing. The new springs from the ruins of the old. My service shall be like this, too: I shall find ever new ways to contribute, avoiding imprisoning ruts. I must keep an open mind, appreciate the values and viewpoints of those whom I would serve. Only in this way will my ideas and services be relevant.

There is a subtle influence with which the city impresses itself upon one's psyche, like the air that one breathes or the light that filters down from the sun. Arising from the host of individuals making up the city, it is a background that sets a tone to one's city existence.

It is the soul of the city.

Like the city, I, too, can set a tone. If I adopt and live ideals and values that are mutually consistent and that derive from Infinite unity, then my being becomes a subtle fragrance that can invigorate some of those with whom I come into contact.

It seems right, this concept of giving others, as one's highest offering, what one is. Of saying wordlessly, here is the highest that I can be, based on my noblest yearning and vision; if you like it, you may take what portion you

desire and be this, too, or more; if you do not incline toward this, feel at peace, for no overt offer has been made, no condition set upon you.

“Be noble”! said Lowell, “and the nobleness that lies in other men, sleeping, but never dead, will rise in majesty to meet thine own.”

5. Others there Are

The faces around me in the greenness of the park and in the bustling of the city wear a panoply of expressions. Some show contemplation, some display thoughts of work or effort, some betray lingering traces of disappointment, suspicion, or fear, some are lit by anticipation or contentment. Many, I realize, are engaged, in their own lives, in approaching the Infinite, in their own frames of reference.

It might be easy for me, in the flush of my newly attained discoveries, to overlook the fact that I am a sheer beginner at service. A novice server. My enthusiasm could blind me to the fact that behind numerous faces in the crowded streets, faces that I might never suspect, are minds and hearts committed to higher reality and to service.

A poor education does not disqualify one from experiencing profound feelings. An unsophisticated demeanor does not deny one flashes of soaring insight. Abilities are not persons. They are only coverings. How many great persons live and move behind mediocre facades imposed by birth and circumstance? How many attempt to voice transcendent personal awakenings, but, through lack of communication skills, find themselves in conceptual isolation? How many strain—struggle supremely—to share vibrant realities with others, but experience only prosaic words, emerging as apparent trivialities from their own seemingly passive and unconcerned lips?

I must be aware of this and ground my offerings in the knowledge that I

am not the only one who might possess something worth giving. In the teeming city, many labor to give with selfless hearts. I shall strive to be receptive to offerings laid before me and, when I receive, receive as nobly as I would give. Thereby I acknowledge the worth of the gift, hence of the giver.

Observing the streaming people and their diverse pursuits, I espy that through participation in the life of the city, each is giving to all of the others. And I recognize that the giving of self is the basis of all service. This giving is done consciously by some, unconsciously by others. Even the little mockingbird that makes its rounds near me and graces the lifeless depiction of Diana with its innocently uptilted rump is, in its fidelity of being what it is—a bouncing, chirping, manifestation of life—giving of itself. The difference between its giving and my giving is that as a self-conscious being, I can make a gift that is more than conditioned phases of living.

6. The Wisdom of Restraint

The city is a realm of unseen boundaries. A line circumscribes its extent, within which municipal ordinances reign. Internal lines subdivide it into differentiated localities. Financial districts where intent hands pursue moneyed plans. Voting districts that shape the choices of franchised citizens. Housing districts that mirror the circumstances of their inhabitants.

The world of relationships, too, is marked off into areas, each area a type of relationship, a region of specific interpersonal conduct. These localities, I shall learn well. For each which I choose to enter, I shall survey the terrain of my personal values and develop a map specifying my anticipated activities within its precincts.

To give oneself to another without the defining facilitation of a relationship is to diffuse oneself like air exploding from a burst balloon. Such

a self-destructive act benefits no one. Structure in personal interactions serves a purpose. Not an end in itself, interpersonal structure is a vessel. A projection screen that conveys intent. It defines, on the one hand, minimums and prerequisites, on the other hand, limits and sufficiencies.

Each relationship is a unique world. Personality interactions that might be appropriate between a husband and wife might not be appropriate between an employer and employee. Each genre of relationship specifies accepted and required parameters of other-interest and self-interest, both of which are essential to preserve the arrangement and define its meaning.

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One function that relationships provide is stabilization. But like other stabilizing mechanisms, relationships conceal among their blossoms the dangerous thorn of submergence of individuality. Because of unclear visualization of the factors that define a particular relationship, one can fall into making decisions on the basis not of choice, but of pressures brought by others or even by oneself in the form of interpretations of proprieties of the relationship.

This is evident in some relationships of affection. The coercive challenge, if you loved me, you would . . . , works at supplanting personal choice with compliance. How shall I react to this situation when its cold grip touches my being? The answer is clear. I shall do what I see as right and not abandon choice. To do what I perceive as not right is to do wrong in my perception. And in the end, if it proves to be wrong, even my forceful persuader will rebuke me for abdicating choice and doing toward him or her what I had believed to be wrong.

In judging the right, I must weigh many factors, some not obvious.

Sometimes, because of a particular circumstance, I might adjudge that the perception of my service by the beneficiary is more important to that person's welfare than the literal results of the service; for perceptions affect self-esteem and other-esteem, vital elements of volition.

To serve is to work for the benefit of another. But self-abnegation and self-effacement are not service; they are an abandonment of will or even a form of reverse ostentation.

7. Predecisions

In service, self as an objective is not a factor. But to serve, one must maintain integrity to self and live up to one's values. One must follow a set of commandments dictated by one's highest self, a collection of predeterminations: I shall do this in this circumstance; I shall not do that. One must take care that these are phrased in a high reference frame and do not take the form of mere details of everyday living.

From my brief interview with my city teacher thus far, I have already decided upon some things. Paramount among these is that I need to become ever-more-sensitive to the person—the actual human being—inside each fleshly exterior that I encounter.

I have decided that I shall employ tact when serving. Also that I shall, when giving, give nobly to the best of my ability, for the benefit of the other, in a manner consistent with my, and the recipient's, ideals. And I shall attempt to avoid creating artificial situations designed to facilitate my service.

When misunderstood, I shall avoid excessive explanation; it would accomplish nothing. My years have revealed to me that in personal affairs, it is the other person's heart—not mind—that speaks judgement, unwittingly revealing its own intent. In the eyes of one who loves me, I can do no wrong.

To one who is negative toward me, I can do no right.

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Service is the ultimate manifestation of choice. The moment one embarks upon this path, one faces the danger of falling from the path of choice into volitionless ruts of undiscriminating tradition. The stereotyping phrase, “one who serves does this—or that,” echoes in every human mind, born of mixtures of religion, drama, literature, and daydreaming.

Life is a process of establishing a collection of self-images for each occasion, then responding according to these self-images. To exercise choice, one must develop these for oneself rather than let their construction default to the popular consensus of the times.

If one is to serve, one must not be led by stereotyped gestures inexpressive of one’s ideals and values. The “proper” image for a religious person or a personally sensitive man or woman or a caring individual is impressed in our psyches. But images are nonrealities, useful only as they persuade persons to accept the good intentions that other persons entertain toward them. We may sometimes think we know what God wishes for us—or even for others—to do. But are the Infinite’s wishes really hemmed in by the finite, as some suppose? by social and religious conventions of specific societies germane to certain times?

As I study the city and its humming parts, I recognize that conventions are useful as tools for service, but that they are misplaced when, in the name of service, they become enslavers of choice.

8. The Need for Relationships

The city spreads about me in diversity. Near the park stands a

courthouse, solemn rendezvous of justice. Within a few city blocks, several art galleries offer visitors the inspirations of artists. A nearby church lines its facade with statues of religious and secular personages.

The world of relationships is diverse like this, too. Each type of relationship is a separate template for interpersonal encounters. Knowledge of this can assist me in choosing my service: whom I shall serve, and in what capacity. Without some defining factor, one's service could be consumed all at once, before it really begins.

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As I watch the shadows lengthen in my quiet park, I remember a time, years ago, on a Florida beach, watching the afternoon shadows lengthen over sands temporarily deserted by the populace. Quiet echoes of laughs and shouts hung over the golden sand like wistful sighs.

It had been a full day. A relaxing day. Content, I rose to go, swinging down briefly and plucking up an empty beverage can from the sand. Tossing the can into a receptacle, I paused, noticing a young acquaintance who, also preparing to leave, had spied me at my small task. As I watched, she sought out an abandoned beverage container, which she, also, dropped into the trash receptacle.

We exchanged smiles. Quickly and enthusiastically, she collected two more empty cans. These, also, she placed in the receptacle. Then more as, face flushed, she continued her act of unselfishness. Gradually she slowed, finally pausing and looking at me. As our mutual gaze turned down the shoreline, we observed hundreds, perhaps thousands, of empty cans as far as we could see, on into the mist of the distance.

She stood with an empty container in each hand, her face drawn by the

implacable struggle of good intentions wrestling with an impossible task, and looked at me with dismay. In that huge instant, I perceived that although ideals are wonderful things, wisdom must be their companion.

Gently I extended a hand in her direction. Wordlessly she placed a can in it. With deliberation, I dropped the hollow cylinder toward the sand, where it settled with the lightness of thistledown. The light returned to her eyes. Dropping her remaining can onto the sand, she smiled a long smile, then gathered up her belongings and departed. I watched her receding figure as it became a small but significant speck against the vast shore.

§

More than logic must guide one's service activities. If one wishes to serve, why not give everything one possesses to charity? Why not approach the first stranger one meets and enlist in a lifetime of carrying out his or her bidding? That is a logical concept of service. But not a meaningful one.

There must be form to one's giving. Algorithms. The facilitator of this is relationships. Marriage partner . . . child . . . parent . . . work associate . . . neighbor. Each of these relationships possesses rituals, service opportunities, protective limitations. In my service labors I shall set my goals, decide my actions, and evaluate my progress in terms of the standards that these relationships carry.

I shall be open to some temporary relationships that arise in passing, for these are ways to serve; also to longer-term relationships. I shall limit the number of relationships in which I engage to one that I can sustain without compromising them. I shall attempt to enter primarily into relationships that offer themselves naturally in the flow of my circumstances, in which I feel that I belong.

9. Reflected Light

Service, I think, is sometimes best for the recipient when he or she does not perceive it as service. A relationship offers a way to serve in the name of the relationship rather than in the name of service. Service is only service before it is applied. In the giving, it transmutes into something else, something transcendent and unnameable, a living reality sculpted in the combinings of souls. Like a rainbow or a cloud visible from a distance but disappearing upon close approach, service is the misty view from afar. There is no name for its close-up counterpart. Love, perhaps, if the word be spoken softly, quickly, then left behind. Names can separate one from the sublime realities they are intended to summon.

Labor tended in the name of service robs the recipient of a portion of that unnameable, close-up reality and also of the feeling of being worthy of personal attention just for his or her own sake. One must conceal, to a degree, the blazing of one's service intent, with a lamp shade. In addition to letting the service be perceived as one's part in a relationship, one can let it be perceived as a part of one's work. Or one's hobby. Or one's inclination.

Am I a writer? Then I shall serve by what I write and how I write it. Am I a driver, a lawyer, a secretary? I can make a gift of service through my occupation, and my beneficiaries will accept it because it is a part of my occupation. Even impersonal excellence, when pursued for the sake of others, is service.

In my efforts to give, I shall recognize that my good intentions alone are not enough for the welfare of those whom I would serve. Only results benefit the recipients, and these are brought about through proficiency at service. I must find service areas where I am needed, where my efforts are meaningful, and where I can make a difference.

10. The Real Enlightenment

The convolutions of the city, its streets, buildings, and manifold activities, are past finding out. One can never exhaust their variety. Always are new combinations of endeavor and intent, cause and result, emerging from the evolutionary urban cauldron.

I perceive now, as I gaze out at the unformulatable variety—the sharp city skyline, the undecipherable totality arising from myriad individual motions—that the growth of the city is endless.

And I come to understand that this phase of my quest for choice, this pilgrimage to the city, is likewise endless. In searching for choice, I have pursued the understanding of true values. Gaining some understanding, I have committed myself to unity with the Infinite and to values that articulate with those of the Infinite. This commitment was an act of an existential nature in that, being qualitative only, it was accomplished in an instant.

Now, having arrived in the city, I am at the threshold of my future labor, which is the task of experientializing my unity with the Infinite and all things. This experientializing in the finite of the purposes of the Infinite is an ever-perfecting reality, one never really finished. Always will I be discovering new ways to interact more faithfully, always finding better techniques of bestowing sensitive concern to the true needs of others. So shall the others who accept citizenship in the city.

§

I see, now, perceive it all from the towering mountain, though no physical mountain is in sight, attain to the advantages of high perspective. Through me flow the energies of the vast river of transcendent becoming.

Within and around me shimmer and flare the upholdings of the ocean of infinite unity. And I am a citizen of the city of selfless service.

When I was a child, I played in the city, carefree, taking no heed of its portents and implications. Life was a summer breeze, a fragile, dropping snowflake. Running, laughing, I and my friends inhabited a city such as I have not seen in many years. Has it grown rigid and humorless, now, too meaningful? Perhaps. But Zen, I hear, has a saying: “Before enlightenment: hewing wood and hauling water. After enlightenment: hewing wood and hauling water.”

Perhaps enlightenment is a term that designates conscious participation in universal unity. If so, then the Zen saying is instructing its hearers that as one experientializes universal unity, one’s activities do not change in their visible nature from what they had been before. One still engages in the material affairs of life. But the motivation behind one’s activities has become selfless. Transcendent.

Words smother this concept in sophistication. Hence its brief formulation. Higher reality embodies an aspect of simplicity. I believe that on the path of unity with all things, life becomes once again a world of childhood. Not, of course, in the literal sense. Commitment to the unity of all things leads to efforts at experientialization that require experience and wisdom—not unreasoned childishness. But one can embody these things in a spirit of simplicity and even of childlikeness. In uncomplicated openness, trust, and innocent good intentions.

True choice is a simple reality temporarily obscured, perhaps, by the analysis and explanation necessary to discover it. Once found, it shines like the sun.

The fullness of day has passed in my little park in the heart of the city.

Now the multifold sound of the city, quieter and more harmonious, echoes gently, like a hushed organ in a great hall. The birds in the park find their perches for the evening. People passing by wear relaxed expressions as they enter the doorway of the night.

A wonderful satisfaction immerses my being.

I know that it will be a good day tomorrow.

Contents

One - The Mountain

1. [Out of the Dark](#)
2. [The Unity of the Days](#)
3. [Wings of Choice](#)
4. [The Basis of Humility](#)
5. [The Inner World](#)
6. [The Nature of Choice](#)
7. [The Universal Unity](#)
8. [True Meaning](#)
9. [The Hand of the Infinite](#)

Two - The River

1. [Free at Last](#)
2. [Beyond the Time Flow](#)
3. [Time Unmasked](#)
4. [The Myth of Time](#)
5. [Spun from the Timestream](#)
6. [Transcend the Wild Flow](#)

7. [Love - The Bridge](#)
8. [Truth - The Wayshower](#)
9. [A Child of Time](#)

Three - The Ocean

1. [Return to the Source](#)
2. [The Two Keys to Eternity](#)
3. [The One Most Worthy](#)
4. [Trust Transcended](#)
5. [Unity Comprehended](#)
6. [The Infinite Parent](#)
7. [Destined for Eternity](#)
8. [Divinity Perceived](#)
9. [The Infinite Person](#)
10. [Transformation](#)

Four - The City

1. [Toward the Real](#)
2. [Soul of the Server](#)
3. [Beyond Old Images](#)
4. [Oneself as Gift](#)
5. [Others there Are](#)
6. [The Wisdom of Restraint](#)

7. [Predecisions](#)
8. [The Need for Relationships](#)
9. [Reflected Light](#)
10. [The Real Enlightenment](#)

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